

What is claimed is:

1. A method of facilitating electronic communications, the method comprising:
in response to an action by an intended communications recipient, receiving
an out-of-band communication from a service provider, wherein the out-of-band
5 communication contains information identifying an expected communications sender and the
intended communications recipient, and wherein the expected communications sender sends
communications to the intended communications recipient over a communication channel
other than the channel through which the out-of-band communication was received;
determining whether the identifying information for the expected
10 communications sender appears in a white-list associated with the intended communications
recipient; and
adding the identifying information for the expected communications sender to
the white-list associated with the intended communications recipient in response to a
determination that the identifying information for the expected communications sender does
15 not appear in the white-list associated with the intended communications recipient.

2. The method of claim 1, further comprising:
upon expiration of a specified time period, triggering deletion of the
identifying information for the expected communications sender from the white-list
20 associated with the intended communications recipient.

3. The method of claim 1, wherein the identifying information for the expected
communications sender is an e-mail address for the expected communications sender.

25 4. The method of claim 1, wherein the identifying information for the expected
communications sender is an IM screen name for the expected communications sender.

5. The method of claim 1, wherein the identifying information for the expected
communications sender is one of an IP address, a MAC address, and a domain name.

30 6. The method of claim 1, further comprising:

determining whether the identifying information for the intended communications recipient appears in a white-list associated with the expected communications sender; and

adding the identifying information for the intended communications recipient to the white-list associated with the expected communications sender in response to a determination that the identifying information for the intended communications recipient does not appear in the white-list associated with the expected communications sender.

7. The method of claim 1, further comprising:
upon receipt of a communication from the expected communications sender, triggering the sending of the communication to the intended communications recipient.

8. The method of claim 7, wherein the received communication is one of an e-mail and an instant message.

9. The method of claim 7, wherein the received communication is a telephone call.

10. The method of claim 7, wherein the received communication is a message posted to an online message board.

11. The method of claim 7, further comprising:
upon sending the communication to the intended communications recipient, triggering deletion of the identifying information for the expected communications sender from the white-list associated with the intended communications recipient.

12. The method of claim 7, further comprising:
notifying the intended communications recipient that the expected communications sender is scheduled to be removed from the white-list; and
asking the intended communications recipient whether the expected communications sender should be kept in the white-list.

13. A method of automated white-listing, the method comprising:

receiving a communication from a service provider over an out-of-band communication channel, the out-of-band communication identifying an expected e-mail sender and an intended e-mail recipient and the out-of-band communication being received
5 by a communications service provider associated with the intended e-mail recipient, where communications from the expected e-mail sender are sent over a communication channel other than the channel through which the out-of-band communication was received;

determining whether the communication service provider has a global white-list for e-mail filtering;

10 if the communications service provider has a global white-list, automatically adding information identifying the expected e-mail sender and a transactional identifier to the global white-list;

determining whether the intended e-mail recipient has a personal white-list for e-mail filtering; and

15 if the intended e-mail recipient has a personal white-list, automatically adding the information identifying the expected e-mail sender and the transactional identifier to the personal white list of the intended e-mail recipient.

14. The method of claim 13, wherein automatically adding information
20 identifying the expected e-mail sender and a transactional identifier to the global white-list includes adding a type indicator, the type indicator permitting special handling of in-band communications.

15. The method of claim 14, further comprising:

25 determining whether the communications service provider has a global black-list for e-mail filtering;

if the communication service provider has a global black-list, determining whether the expected e-mail sender is blocked by the global black-list from sending e-mail to the intended recipient, and automatically modifying the global black-list to permit the
30 expected e-mail sender to send e-mail to the intended e-mail recipient;

determining whether the intended e-mail recipient has a personal black-list for e-mail filtering; and

if the intended e-mail recipient has a personal black-list, determining whether the expected e-mail sender is blocked by the personal black-list from sending e-mail to the intended recipient, and automatically modifying the personal black-list to permit the expected e-mail sender to send e-mail to the intended e-mail recipient.

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16. A method of automatically adding an e-mail address of a e-mail sender to a list of approved e-mail sender addresses associated with an intended e-mail recipient, where the e-mail address of the e-mail sender is provided by a third party service provider sending an out-of-band communication to a communications service provider associated with the intended recipient and where the out-of-band communication is provided in response to an action by the intended e-mail recipient, the method comprising:

receiving an out-of-band communication from a service provider over a communication channel, the out-of-band communication specifying an e-mail address of an e-mail sender and an e-mail address of an intended e-mail recipient, where the e-mail sender sends communications to the intended e-mail recipient over a communication channel other than the channel through which the out-of-band communication was received;

adding the e-mail address of the e-mail sender to a list of approved e-mail sender addresses associated with the intended e-mail recipient, whereby the intended e-mail recipient can receive e-mail from the e-mail sender; and

automatically deleting the e-mail address of the e-mail sender from the list of approved e-mail sender addresses associated with the intended e-mail recipient in response to completion of a specified end trigger.

17. The method of claim 16, wherein adding the e-mail address for the e-mail sender includes adding a transactional identifier.

18. The method of claim 16, wherein adding the e-mail address for the e-mail sender includes adding a time stamp.

19. The method of claim 16, wherein the specified end trigger is an out-of-band communication from the third party service provider indicating that the e-mail address for the

e-mail sender should be removed from the list of approved e-mail sender addresses associated with the intended e-mail recipient.

20. The method of claim 16, wherein adding the e-mail address for the e-mail
5 sender includes adding an expiration date.

21. The method of claim 16, wherein the specified end trigger includes expiration of the expiration date.

10 22. The method of claim 16, wherein the specified end trigger includes initiated by the service provider.

23. The method of claim 16, wherein the specified end trigger includes an actioninitiated by an e-mail service provider.

15 24. The method of claim 16, wherein the specified end trigger includes expiration of a specified time duration.

25 20 25. The method of claim 16, wherein the specified end trigger includes receipt of an e-mail by the intended e-mail recipient.

26. The method of claim 16, wherein the specified trigger includes receipt of a threshold number of e-mails from the e-mail sender to the intended e-mail recipient.

25 27. The method of claim 16, wherein the out-of-band communication is received over a virtual private network.

28. The method of claim 16, wherein the out-of-band communication is received using a remote procedure call.

30 29. A system for automatically configuring a white-list communications filter associated with a communications user, the system comprising:

a communications gateway configured to receive out-of-band communications from one or more authorized service providers, where the out-of-band communication is received over a communication channel;

a communications filter system maintaining a white-list communications filter identifying trusted communication sources; and

means for automatically configuring the white-list communications filter based on the out-of-band communications received by the communications gateway.

30. The system of claim 29, further comprising:

means for permitting manipulation of the communications filter system by a user.

31. A method of facilitating electronic communications, the method comprising:

receiving an out-of-band communication identifying a first communications user that is expected to send communications to an identified second communications user over a communication channel other than the channel through which the out-of-band communication was received; and

based on the received out-of-band communication, configuring a white-list to temporarily permit communications from the first communications user to be received by the second communications user, and configuring a black-list to temporarily prevent communications from the first communications user from being blocked by the black-list.

32. A method of transactional communications filtering, the method comprising:

receiving an out-of-band communication identifying an expected communications sender and an intended communications recipient, the out-of-band communication indicating that the expected communications sender should be permitted to send communications to the intended communications recipient for a set transactional period, where the communications are sent over a communication channel other than the channel through which the out-of-band communication was received;

if communications sent to the intended communications recipient is filtered through a global white-list, automatically adding transactional information identifying the expected communications sender to the global white-list;

if communications sent to the intended communications recipient is filtered through a global black-list that would prevent receipt of communications from the expected communications sender, automatically creating a transactional exception for the expected communications sender in the global black-list, whereby the created exception prevents the global black-list from blocking communications from the expected communications sender;

if communications sent to the intended communications recipient is filtered through a personal white-list, automatically adding transactional information identifying the expected communications sender to the personal white-list; and

if communications sent to the intended communications recipient is filtered through a personal black-list that would prevent receipt of communications from the expected communications sender, automatically creating a transactional exception for the expected communications sender in the personal black-list, whereby the created exception prevents the personal black-list from blocking communications from the expected communications sender.

33. The method of claim 32, wherein the out-of-band communication includes a transactional identifier.

34. The method of claim 32, further comprising:
upon occurrence of an end trigger, removing the transactional information from the global and personal white-lists and removing the transactional exception from the global and personal black-lists.

35. The method of claim 32, further comprising:
presenting an option to allow the intended communications recipient to make the transactional information in the global and personal white-lists and the transactional exception in the global and personal black-list permanent, whereby the expected communications sender is permitted to send communications to the intended recipient after the conclusion of the set transactional period.

36. The method of claim 32, wherein the communications sent by the expected communications sender includes e-mail.

37. The method of claim 32, wherein the communications sent by the expected communications sender includes instant messages.

5 38. The method of claim 32, wherein the personal white-list is maintained on a server associated with a communications service provider that provides communication services to the intended communications recipient.

10 39. The method of claim 32, wherein the personal white-list is maintained on a local device used by the intended communications recipient.

40. The method of claim 39, wherein the local device is one of a personal computer, a personal digital assistant, and a cellular phone.

15 41. A method of facilitating electronic communications between two entities, the method comprising:

receiving an out-of-band communication from an authorized source, wherein the out-of-band communication contains information identifying an expected communications sender and an intended communications recipient, where the expected communications sender sends communications to the intended communications recipient over a communication channel other than the channel through which the out-of-band communication was received; and

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adding, based on the received out-of-band communication, the identifying information for the expected communications sender to a list of approved communications senders associated with the intended communications recipient.

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42. The method of claim 41, further comprising:
removing the identifying information for the expected communications sender upon expiration of a specified time period.

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